

PLAYBOY

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SOC 4.01.4 The French
CONSPIRACY

Jean-Louis Trintignant, Jean Seberg, Michel Piccoli, Roy Scheider (Gene Hackman's partner in *The French Connection*) and an ace international supporting cast create mesmerizing intrigue in *The French Conspiracy*, a fiction based freely upon the known facts of a celebrated political scandal. In 1963, Ben Barka—leader of French Morocco's left-wing opposition party—was abducted and presumably murdered in Paris as the climax of a high-level plot involving American CIA men, French underworld characters and top Moroccan and French officials. Very low-key, ready as ever to make mediocrity seem a fascinating fault, Trintignant plays the spineless journalist who is bribed and bullied into enticing a Third World leader named Sadiel (the Ben Barka character, coolly portrayed by Italy's Gian Maria Volonte) back from exile in Switzerland, on the pretext of a guest appearance in a television documentary. Among director Yves Boisset's chief collaborators here was author Jorge Semprun, scenarist of *Z*, who undoubtedly contributed much from his private stock of political savvy. In the age of Watergate, there is nagging resonance in a press-conference scene that pits a French government minister against a supposedly tough TV commentator (Philippe Noiret) who just happens to have been a major figure in the kidnap plot and now takes a role as probing reporter in the cover-up. *French Conspiracy* lacks the sizzling pace that made *Z* a bonanza, yet it's taut, topical and generously fortified with food for thought.